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Rep. Doris Matsui Warns of Dangers of Distracted Driving

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-05) participated in the joint hearing of the House Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection and the Communications, Technology, and the Internet Subcommittees on “Driven to Distraction: Technological Devices and Vehicle Safety.” Representative Matsui’s opening statement, as prepared for delivery, is below:

“It is important that we examine the safety issues caused by drivers who are distracted by communications devices. With more than 270 million cell phone subscribers, most Americans rely on wireless devices to communicate with their family, their friends and for business purposes. Unfortunately, though, for many drivers, the first instinct after starting the engine is who to call or text. In fact, recent studies have shown about four in five cell phone owners make calls while driving, and nearly one in five send text messages. While several states, including my home state of California, have banned texting and the use of hand-held phones while driving, unfortunately, such prohibitions have not deterred enough motorists from using such devices, or prevented accidents as a result.

“In California, there have been a number of tragic incidents involving cell phones or texting, including last year’s tragic commuter train accident in which the operator was texting and 25 people died. And a current study by Car and Driver magazine indicated that texting poses a greater threat than driving under the influence.

“That being said, I’m pleased that the Administration, as well as the wireless industry, are taking on this issue. I applaud the leadership of Secretary LaHood for bringing a renewed sense of urgency to address distracted driving in all modes of transportation, particularly vehicles that transport children. Additionally, I commend Chairman Genachowski, for indicating in his testimony that the FCC will explore ways in which drivers could be informed via outreach

efforts similar to those on DTV and the National Broadband Plan.

“There are far too many individuals being injured or killed by the actions of drivers that can...and should be avoided. Moving forward, we must promote greater awareness regarding the dangers of driving while distracted. It is my hope that we get to a point where Americans see the value of safe cell phone use in the same way they view putting on a seatbelt: it is a precautionary measure they can’t afford not to use.”

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